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Ibogaine: Cure for Addiction?

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The Sunday *Los Angeles Times* Magazine has a long article, well worth reading, on the hallucinogenic drug Ibogaine, being used in clinics from the Caribbean to Canada to Pakistan, and touted as [the new wonder drug](#) to relieve addiction to heroin, opiate painkillers, cocaine, methadone, alcohol and more. The experience is anything but fun, in fact it sounds awful. But thousands of anecdotal accounts have emerged that ibogaine is successful both in reducing cravings for the other substances and eliminating painful withdrawal symptoms.

The drug is illegal in the U.S., but legal in many other countries. The closest, reputable clinic appears to be in Tijuana. As to how it works, here's one explanation:

Ibogaine, as even its most ardent supporters say, is not a cure for drug dependence; however, it apparently can play a potent role as an addiction-interrupter. The drug has two powerful addiction-fighting effects. The first is biochemical: It seems to act on serotonin and opiate systems in the brain, physically nullifying a person's craving for drugs and smoothing their withdrawal symptoms. That's a huge boon for those addicted to heroin and other opiates, many of whom shrink from the physical pain of detox.

"It has been proved to alleviate the pain and physical discomfort of drug withdrawal with animals," says Dr. Stanley Glick, a neuropharmacologist at Albany Medical Center in New York who has researched the drug for years. "And there are lots of reports of it doing the same with humans. You hear the same story a few thousand times, you've got to believe there's something there."

After a few weeks, this craving-blocking effect generally fades. But by then, users have been able to detox relatively painlessly, and then have a month or more free of drug cravings in which to do whatever it takes to stay clean.

The drug has developed a cult following, which may not be a good thing, according to those who hope for funding for scientific human testing of Ibogaine.

"All these clinics popping up all over the world—it's become almost a cult-like phenomenon," It means the scientific establishment and regulatory agencies take a dim view."

But the ranks of the believers keep growing. Six months after his ibogaine treatment, [former addict] Craig says he's staying clean and feeling great. "That stuff worked just like it was supposed to," he says. "It was so much better than the detox I tried. I don't understand why it's not legal."

We won't hold our breath that it will be legal anytime soon in the U.S. It sure would be nice to see someone cough up the money for some studies. It won't be the drug companies. How about the health insurance industry? How much might they stand to save by radically reduced payments for inpatient drug treatment?

It also reminds me of something I learned at a World Health Organization conference on drug addiction I happened to attend in 1969 or 1970 in Montreal or Toronto. The speaker told the group that heroin got its name because it was initially believed to be a "hero" drug -- it cured civil war soldiers of morphine addiction. More than 100 years later, people are finding it hard to kick methadone, a cure for heroin addiction. Will ibogaine require continual administration? Guess that's something else that needs to be studied. Once the U.S. comes to grips with the fact that drug addiction is a medical problem, one we can't jail ourselves out of.

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I don't know If I said it already, but this so good stuff keep up the good work. I read a lot of blogs on a daily basis and for the most part POLITIC just wanted to make a quick comment to say I'm glad I found your blog. Thanks.

Best regards

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